Sermon: Nov. 20, 2011*

The Parish of the Messiah, Auburndale, Mass.:

140 Years of Answering God's Call, 1871-2011

This is supposed to be the last Sunday in Ordinary Time, Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday before Advent, but it really isn't "ordinary time" for us. Today is the birthday of the Parish of the Messiah, 140 years!

Good morning to all of you and thanks for being here. I would like to thank the Vestry for asking me to serve as Parish Historian and then for asking me to work on this project as part of our anniversary celebration. Thanks as well to the congregation, for voting for me to become parish historian at this year's annual meeting. This is something I have particularly enjoyed, because this kind of work fits my training in history, my secular call.

Special thanks to Rev. Suzanne Colburn, for her guidance, and to Melissa, parish clerk, for her tireless work, and for the fun we had in going through the parish archives and in preparing the exhibit in the parish hall. Thanks to all of you for your participation, in chatting with us and in sharing your pictures and memories.

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* Bernie D. Jones joined the Parish of the Messiah in the fall of 2009. In early 2010, she became a Lay Eucharistic Minister and was elected parish historian at annual meeting in 2011. During the course of Advent 2011, she will organize an inquirer's class with Rev. Suzanne Colburn, Interim Priest. In the fall of 2010, she became a parish representative to the Charles River Deanery and became the deanery clerk in the summer of 2011. She has served as an alternate representing the parish at Diocesan Convention since the fall of 2010 and is on the search committee for finding a new rector.

So the topic of my talk today is "the Parish of the Messiah: 140 years of answering God's Call, 1871-2011."

What on earth does that mean? Has Bernie gone over the deep end, sounding like a priest or a deacon, talking about a call? Answering God's call—it is a very Protestant notion isn't it, that God is calling us to be part of our faith communities, doing His work, doing ministry, and building the kingdom.

And this isn't something I just made up. If you look at the Diocesan website, it explains that we are "answering God's urgent call. Together." And the handbook at diocesan convention earlier this month added: "inviting, forming, sending, serving." Our church invites us in, can shape us in understanding ministry, and then sends us out to serve God.

Our predecessors who founded the Parish of the Messiah felt called. They were evangelical in a time when it had a different political meaning and in a time when it was not seen by many as a bad thing.

They felt called as Episcopalians to share the good news of their faith, to worship, think, learn, grow in community, use their gifts in serving God and thus to do God's work.

And yet, answering God's call and doing God's work in community can be messy. The uniqueness of our church, Catholic, yet Protestant, means that we blend elements of Catholic worship with Protestant forms of governance coming from the people: we all have ideas of what we want to do!

We have our unique personalities, needs, interests that can clash, and at times, they did clash. For example, a debate in 1889 under the leadership of the rector, Rev. H.A. Metcalf, over who was qualified to vote at annual meeting, led to an enormous fight and for a time only his family came to services. Yet, they persevered, knowing that the church was far greater and more important than their squabbles.

Their biggest challenge came, though, when the church burned down on Nov. 15, 1943. They didn't know how it happened. It would have been easy to just fold up shop and go away. But they did not. They held services elsewhere; they found the money in the midst of a war. The cornerstone was laid in 1944 by the Bishop of the Diocese of Massachusetts, Henry Knox Sherrill; the dedication of the building we are sitting in took place in 1945, 66 years ago.

They came here when the war ended that year, and there was not enough room to seat everyone! They were thriving. They purchased a new rectory in 1946, the house next door, so that the full-time rector, Rev. Richard McClintock, might meet with parishioners and host parish events. They had all sorts of outreach and ministries, including to Lassell College students down the street.

In late 1949, they were interested in building even more space, Rev. McClintock explained: "our need for room concerns all for we are members of one another. The crowding and confusion affects our family group most of all both in the Sunday activities of the Church School and Choir and the week day activities of all Parish organization which must reduce their programs for want of space. It therefore seems appropriate to launch out on the deep with the Parish Hall Fund Drive. He added: as we work together

for this important end let us remember a prayer: "Lord, deliver us from hot heads that lead us into trouble and from cold feet that lead us nowhere!"

The parish hall was built by 1952; it is where we meet during coffee hour and where the exhibit is located. Jump Start, the Alcoholics Anonymous Group, uses the space during the week, while BITC rents out space downstairs and operates its childcare center today. Jump Start joined us in 1991, while BITC joined us in 1998.

They saw themselves as Episcopalians with a strong sense of their identity and knowledge in their history as Protestants. This grounded their sense of call; they were part of a priesthood of believers. On October 30, 1949, Rev. McClintock celebrated a day I couldn't even find in the prayer book of their time, the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, and it definitely is not in the 1979 prayer book, the red one in the pews. They celebrated Reformation Day, a day acknowledged primarily by Lutherans.

At a time when Americans had just gotten out of World War II and were establishing American institutions as superior in a world threatened by totalitarianism, they asserted that their faith celebrated democracy, as indicated by General Convention where authority came from representatives elected by the people, and I would add, through their vestries and diocesan conventions today. Rev. McClintock explained that their traditions enabled freedom of thought and freedom of religion. They believed that what they had was good, important, and just as valid as anyone else's. They argued that their traditions were even better!

Some of our most long-standing members were part of that early history. The late Bob Bancroft was a member in the 1940s, until his death in 2009. We have his

confirmation certificate. Maxine's parents attended for many years, into the 1970s; she was confirmed here in 1945 and we have her certificate; Bob's was from 1951.

Moving fast forward, we come to the time of Rev. William C. Lowe, the longstanding rector in the most recent memories of parishioners. When he came in 1971 after having served 2 years as a curate at Reedemer in Chesnut Hill, Martha had been a member since 1963. And here she is, all these years later, answering God's call, through her work as an LEM, and her ministry in art and music. In 1979, she painted the Jesse Tree mural.

Once women became eligible for ordination in 1976, Linda Grenz joined the staff as a curate. Judith L. Carpenter served as well. Others of you have been here too, and we have the pictures to prove it—Mona, and Carol; Fred, we know what you looked like in 1985; Daryl and David, Bev and her family, we have seen you too in those old directories from the 1980s and the 1990s. Bruce, we can see you with your clipboard at one of the yard sales in 1987. We have wedding pictures: in the 1980s, Martha's children, hers to Bob, and Pat and Steve's in 1994. We have pictures of Rev. Lowe and his family. We can see him on his motorcycle, along with processions through Auburndale to gather at his house. We also have pictures of Bryen and Teddy at church events—these appeared in the Newton Tab.

Other important events in our lives took place here, like Kathy and Pat being confirmed together here in November of 1993 and Kathy joining the church. She had been attending services every Sunday since 1983. Stephanie and Greg were married here in xyz and Tedy was baptized in 2002. Fred served as treasurer from 1984-1987,

then became junior warden from 1988-1990. He then became senior warden from 1990-1994 and became junior warden again from 2002-2003.

And as for those of us who have joined in the past few years—Juan, joining in 2007, Lerzhan being baptized in 2008, Kevin and Jane joining us in 2010, we are living the call at Messiah as well. Under Rev. Devin Mc Lachlan's leadership from 2005 through earlier this year, we have sponsored 1000 Mugs for Africa, the dream developed by Marlene Nelson before she died. Pursuing her vision, we have sold mugs as part of a fundraiser to support public education for the children of Khethani, a black township outside Winterton, Kwazulu Natal, South Africa. Marlene previously spent time on a dairy farm in Winterton, where she taught pottery to some of the local Zulu farm workers. Through her generosity, she financed the construction of a church building for the Khethani Christian Fellowship.

We are getting to know our neighbors in Auburndale, hosting the yard sale this summer. We administer the Harwood fund for the needy in Auburndale. We attend Diocesan Convention and the Charles River Deanery assemblies, getting to know our neighbors in Brookline, Needham, Wellesley and Dover, for special programming during the Advent and Lenten seasons. We are reaching out to other churches within Newton, like St. John's, Newtonville, where Rev. Lowe once held a joint ministry, or St. Paul's in Newton Highlands and Good Shepherd in Watertown, the church that sponsored Rev. McLachlan into the priesthood. We are hosting Advent lessons and carols with them on December 4.

We are doing thing and getting them done, serving on the vestry, with Bruce and Meg as senior and junior wardens, Juan as bursar, Stephanie as treasurer, Melissa as clerk. Pat does our public relations—a fair number of our sources came from her press releases and articles that appeared especially in the Newton Tab. Steve took so many of the photos on display. He set up our website and organizes our email lists. Bev serves as the altar guild and usher. David organizes our worship booklets and church bulletins. Led by Greg, the children are serving as acolytes, Rebecca, Teddy, Helena and Bryen. Daryl, Stephanie and Meg teach Sunday school year-round, more of us are serving as LEMs. Zoe, Simone and the other children pass the collection plates and carry the gifts at Eucharist. They set up at the coffee hour that a core group of us host on a regular basis, including Stephanie, Kathy, Melanie, Daryl, David, Pat, Steve, Lerzhan and Juan. The music ministry has continued with Night Prayer services and Cappella Clausura rehearsing and hosting concerts here. Tim became our music director in 2008, taking over from Joe Muise who served beginning in 2007. This Advent, we are organizing inquirer's classes to increase our knowledge of our Episcopal faith and to prepare ourselves for adult confirmation and reception.

This is how we are experiencing God's call today at Messiah, in being each other's companions in our spiritual journey, our sense of community across generations, our joyful conversations at coffee hour—it as though we don't want to leave! It shows in our dedication to coming here on Sunday mornings and doing the work we do to make sure that Messiah will continue to grow and be strong for the next 140 years!

And I pray that we will continue answering the call, as our search committee—Pat, Steve, Stephanie, Lerzhan, Lisa, Gillian and Fred--leads us in finding a new rector to take us along in exciting new directions. As such, I would like to end with the prayer for parishes found in the 1979 prayer book, page 817:

> Almighty and ever living God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

And now we will sing the hymn, Auburndale, drafted in the 1890s especially for the Parish of the Messiah by Horatio Parker, whose father was the architect in designing the first chapel. The younger Parker was born in Auburndale and baptized at Messiah. The hymn appeared in the 1916 version of the church hymnal.